

## THROUGH A LENS OF EQUITY

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Assessment! When I was a child, it meant examination that comes at the end of three months/ six months and then at the end of a session. I knew that I can't play during examination time and need to learn what was taught for the last three months. I was aware that once the examination is over, I can again be a free bird! I still remember the joy we had at the end of the last paper of terminal examination. We used to come home dancing, playing 'holi' with ink and making airplanes of our question papers!

Examination is seen as the end of learning – we can happily forget what was 'learnt'. How does it matter, if I forget everything after writing my exams? There is complete isolation of learning in schools with the real life. What matters is the performance in examination.

Examinations create a kind of anxiety, fear and trauma among children, which I think most of us have experienced during the whole course of formal education, even at graduate and postgraduate levels. There are numerous examples of students committing suicide due to examination stress or poor performance. In 2009, 2010 students committed suicide across India due to failures in examination (<http://ncrb.nic.in/CD-ADSI2009/suicides-09.pdf>).

What could be worse than this?

Students, who are always anxious because of examinations and afraid of results, would hardly be able to see the worth of doing / learning something for the pleasure of it and we can think about the repercussions for the future society. What kind of society will these students make?

The children who fail, drop out of the schools. It is not just about one time failure but repeated labeling of children as 'failures' (or donkey or similar other labels).



One who does not 'perform' has to sit on a donkey's table

Children read this as 'I can't do anything good in school'. Children fail, not because they are incapable but because they do not have any interest in what is done in schools. And slowly they lose confidence in their own selves.

Teaching happens, but learning doesn't. The whole process, beginning with morning assembly, sometimes becomes so detached for learners that they 'disobey' teachers and carry out their conversations or engage in activities which the school authorities find unacceptable. These children then are excluded from the school processes.

A separate line of 'disobedient' children. (An example of exclusion)



(Teacher is talking about Karl Marx., students of classes I to IV are among the audience. In the picture we see a separate line of students who were not listening to him.)

Malpractice during examinations is an indicator of how children look at examination – where I must perform, there is no other opportunity and if there is another opportunity, that comes with some stigma. The school and the larger society look at failure as a sign of a student being incapable of doing anything in life. By taking one kind of test only once, we run the risk of spoiling children's self-esteem; especially children at the adolescent stage who can't take distrust and disrespect.

Today we have Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). I see a lot of meaning in it, especially for children. CCE has two kinds of advantages – the first is about the 'education perspective' behind it. Assessment is carried out to smoothen the process of learning. Learning is seen as a process of construction of knowledge where a child is constantly involved. He/she makes new meanings for himself/ herself by assessing the facts/processes vis-à-vis his/her own context and understanding. A teacher plays a role of a facilitator who in collaboration with a child assesses the present stage in child development and creates environment of learning and of success for individual child. Assessment is not only of the child, but also of the resources, teaching practices and overall classroom environment with the yardstick of child's context. The classroom has to be a vibrant space which calls for participation from all.

The second advantage, which I'm going to discuss at length, is about 'equity'. Now, children are free from the burden of memorizing and tension of reproducing 'as it is' in the examination, fears of labels like 'budhdhu' and stress of 'examination days'. I also see a lot of opportunity for children based on their performance in a particular area

rather than based on the biases of teachers - if X scores well in academics, he would also be a good monitor and would also run well. I wonder, if the children who scored well, continuously showed 'good performance' due to their teachers' confidence in them and the children who scored less repeatedly failed because they sensed that their teacher had no confidence in them and they have no place in the classroom. This is where I am convinced about the advantages/efficacy of CCE. Now every learner has to be assessed comprehensively and opportunities of success have to be created by the teacher. No learner feels excluded because he/she is not 'performing' in tests, rather, everyone feels satisfied that he/she is good at 'something' which is equally important.

If we look at classroom processes with a lens of equity, we feel disappointed. Children, usually have no say in what gets taught in school and what kinds of activities are available. For some children, the processes at school are relatively smooth, because the kind of exposure they get at home is very similar to the school culture. But, if we consider children from tribal areas, disadvantaged background, we find that they remain completely alienated – the language they speak at home has no place in school, the activities they carry out for earning their bread and butter have no mention in books, food items that they eat are nowhere near the picture of balanced diet presented in classroom, members of the school community maintain a 'distance' because their clothes are dirty and so on. Then these children are expected to perform based on the prescribed curriculum. How does one rationalize this process of assessment?

CCE helps to STOP people from labeling children. A child is an individual with a lot of strengths to be identified. One question paper CANNOT assess child's abilities. Development and learning in child DOES NOT require any certificate, at least

at the elementary level. The system needs it to take administrative decisions and the load of 'pass / fail' is put on little children. CCE does not mean frequent tests.

CCE is not just about exams and evaluation. It changes the whole paradigm of evaluation and how 'learning processes' and 'child' are viewed. Implementing CCE means –

- Looking at every child as an individual with their own individuality, their basic nature – some are shy, some introvert, some outspoken. Here being shy or extrovert is ones' own personality. It has nothing to do with success or no success in life or usefulness in society.
- Ability to identify individual strengths. Understanding children in our classroom is vital to the teaching learning process and also for the development and learning among children. One time and one kind (paper-pencil) of testing is not useful here. What we need is a comprehensive approach towards understanding child's abilities. Understanding his/her background, context, her strengths as a learner etc.
- A child's performance is compared with himself/ herself. Every child comes with certain context and has certain conditions at home. This leads to children with similar abilities performing differently. Hence comparing with oneself is a good way to assess learning.
- Performance is seen as a continuum. Every child is at different points.
- Assessment to assess where a child is and for providing individualized opportunities of learning. Assessment is seen as an integral part of learning process.

- Being sensitive to learners. Sensitivity towards a child's background, listening to his/her words carefully, showing trust and respect. – These are essential conditions of learning and performing.

These processes of CCE would help in bringing children to school. Opportunity for all – no body is excluded because they have certain language at home, because they have a certain culture.

It will also address the quality issue – since the number of children coming to school and remaining in school would increase, one has to increase the benchmark of quality. This will further influence the whole teaching learning process.

This discussion is not to show CCE as a magic wand. The objective is to look at CCE as paradigm shift in our understanding about child, development and learning. Looking at this whole issue with a lens of Equity may help us to rationalize the importance of Continuous and Comprehensive evaluation.

School education needs to be sensitive about the impact of labels and failures or low performance in examinations among children. Understanding about the aim of school education – it is not to just promote or retain children. Generally, schools focus more on who has got good ranks, the children with poor performance get no attention – nobody thinks about them.

I hope we create a system for learning and not for filtering.

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